

Anglia Ruskin Funded Learning and Teaching Project Reports, 2012

The 9/10 Project: Working towards getting 9/10 students to recommend us to a friend

Abstract

At Anglia Ruskin University, postgraduate applicants to become trainee primary and secondary teachers take part in a face-to-face interview process. This takes place eight or nine months before they join us, with some sent rejections immediately and others 'held' until places are offered from February onwards. The only contact they have is through Admissions and as this is mainly their queries about when their offer will be confirmed it is not necessarily perceived as a positive experience. Applicants do have the opportunity to meet their peers and the academic staff on the pre-course day in July. A number of prospective applicants are unable to attend and therefore miss out on this opportunity. They are mailed the documentation from the event. Those missing the event will therefore not have met their peers nor been briefed on the course. This project aims to keep all these applicants, engaged with our Department from application stage onwards, well before they start to study, by offering a set of interactive learning materials online, modelling aspects of school life. We aimed to do this by developing an interactive website with two of our Essex partner schools, Maylandsea Primary School and Cornelius Vermuyden Secondary School.

Keywords

trainee teacher, primary school, secondary school



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Introduction

To become a teacher and teach in a UK publicly funded school, a pre-requirement is the completion of an Initial Teacher Training course (ITT). The traditional route into teaching still remains through a university BA or PGCE course: a route still regarded by Ofsted (2010) as providing the best quality training. However, there are an increasing number of different routes into teaching which include: school based routes such as the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) and the School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT), as well as initiatives such as Teach First which is aimed at high achievers, who may also be career changers. Current policy builds on the recommendations of the independent Policy Exchange report, *More Good Teachers* (2008) and the priorities identified by the current government in The School's White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (2010), and the subsequent Education Act of 2011. A key feature of the government's drive to raise the standard and quality of teaching and learning is to place good and outstanding schools at the centre of educational change, and this includes teacher training and subsequent CPD for teachers. Schools can now bid for ITT training places under the Schools Direct Scheme, and work with providers to train teachers to meet local needs and demands.

Regardless of the training route, all providers must recruit high quality applicants with the potential to become good or outstanding teachers. Entry requirements include a minimum of a GCSE C grade in English and Mathematics, and also Science for those wanting to train to be a primary teacher. PGCE routes also require a minimum of a 2.2 degree: for secondary training courses at least 50% of the degree needs to be in the subject that the applicant wishes to teach. In shortage secondary subjects (Mathematics, Science, Modern Languages and ICT) the entry requirement can take account of prior experience and where necessary a subsidised Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) course may be recommended before starting the course. From September 2013 applicants will also have to pass the government's skills tests in numeracy and literacy, which are currently taken during the training course.

The Admission Process

At Anglia Ruskin University postgraduate applicants to primary and secondary courses have to meet the initial selection criteria at the point of application through the Graduate Teacher Training Agency (GTTR). This includes academic qualifications, some knowledge/experience of teaching and learning, and a strong personal statement and academic reference. Successful applicants are then invited for interview, which can start from November onwards prior to the year of starting the course. Primary applications have to be submitted by 1 December, whilst secondary applications can continue throughout the year and the pattern of application can vary between subjects.

At this stage the only contact that applicants, and future students, have with the university is through Anglia Ruskin's Admissions, so any queries about applications, the course and any subsequent offer are raised with them. The current situation can mean that an applicant could be interviewed in December or January, and then not have any further communication from the university until the pre-course day in July. Those who can attend meet their peers, tutors and other key staff, but a number of prospective students are unable to attend due to work commitments and therefore miss out on this opportunity. They are mailed the documentation from the event, which at the moment is the only option for giving them information about the course.

Whilst pre-course targets are set as part of a student's offer, we recognise that there is some 'dead time' when the future student has no further connection with the university: this is not a positive experience. With the increasing requirement for providers to know their trainees, assess their training needs and personalise their training programme, it is now even more important to engage with future students before they start the course.

This project is aimed at potential students from the application stage onwards and seeks to build a relationship with them that will last beyond their training year, into their Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) year, and beyond. We also aim to keep successful applicants 'warm' by providing an introduction to the course and opportunities to develop their own knowledge and awareness of current issues in education. We hope that this will result in subsequent trainees being better prepared to start the course. We aim to do this by developing an interactive website with two of our Essex partner schools: Maylandsea Primary School in Maylandsea, and The Cornelius Vermuyden School on Canvey Island.

Project Aims

A recent review of applications suggests that some potentially successful applicants sell themselves short in their personal statement; hence the signposting of advice and guidance is likely to be beneficial at the application stage. In addition to improving student satisfaction pre-entry we believe it will help to create an environment where nine out of ten students will recommend us to a friend. It will be focussed on teacher education and we anticipate that it will help to retain good applicants, increase student satisfaction and enable us to start building towards good student performance. This will support our performance during future Ofsted inspections.

Our project aims are:

- To engage pre-entry students using a blended learning strategy;
- To create a series of online resources that will engage our potential students;
- To enhance the existing professional development workshop before students commence their studies with us, this will scaffold their subsequent learning.

The importance of partnership schools

The Department of Education has always valued close working relationships with schools as central to our successful teacher training courses. This has included school staff being involved in interviews, strategic partnership meetings, mentoring and delivering centre-based training. The current PGCE primary and secondary courses (introduced September 2010) are 'stakeholder driven' and our current model of school partnership evolved from close working with schools in the Partnership Development Group. We work with a large number of different types schools in the Eastern region, which through our partnership also exist in geographic hubs. These include those who have recently been given Teaching School status, and those applying for Schools Direct training places. It was therefore a natural step to consider the involvement of schools in the development of the online resources and materials, and indeed both schools were keen to work on this venture. The school involvement will provide an authentic voice, particularly on current areas of practice that are a national priority. These include the teaching of early reading through the use of Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) in the primary school, the use of ICT in teaching and learning, and Special Educational Needs (SEN). The voice of a practitioner will provide an insight into what happens in the classroom, and help to engage new trainees with some of the issues prior to starting the course. The PGCE course is very pressured with 24 of the 36 weeks in school (primary currently less than this, but will be the same as secondary from 2013 course) so will be important that our students are aware of the demands of the course, the key skills and knowledge that they will need, and some of the key issues in education today.

The Development Process

After obtaining the permission from our two partner schools to film, a pre-filming site visit took place, to brief staff as to the scope and aim of the project and encourage their participation and suggestions. Issues such as safe guarding children and ethics were discussed, and summary notes sent to all participants to ensure a shared understanding of the process of filming. A filming date and schedule were agreed by both schools, and as the filming took place, key staff were offered feedback on the process, and clear explanations for requests were given, as well as reassuring class teachers being filmed that the footage would be carefully edited and content agreed before the website was published and available to the public.

Maylandsea Primary School

Pilot website: <http://www.corma.co.uk/debbie/maylandsea/index.html>

'The unusual design of the school is based on the traditional features of old Essex maltings situated on the river Blackwater at Salcott, and consists of two pavilions linked by the reception and administration areas. One contains an assembly hall, kitchen and recreational facilities, whilst the other houses teaching areas for ten classes, music, ICT, staff and group rooms. A brand new purpose-built double classroom block was opened in April 2008 to accommodate the year 6 children.

'The school is surrounded by three separate playground areas, featuring age appropriate adventure play equipment, a grass playing field, a pond and landscaped gardens to create a most attractive environment for pupils and visitors alike' (<http://www.maylandsea.essex.sch.uk/>).

The school run a writing project called the 'The Big Write', which we followed for a day in the school, filming writing activities in Y1, Y4, Y5/6 and then created an interactive website featuring film clips showing interviews with staff, Governors and the School Special Needs Co-ordinator and including interactive online activities for visitors to the website as well as links to key Government documents. Thus potential trainees have a much greater insight into how a primary school day is structured, as well as the roles and responsibilities of teachers in different year groups.



Figure 1: Children in Y1 write a story

The Cornelius Vermuyden Secondary School

Pilot website <http://www.corma.co.uk/debbie/vermuyden/index.html>

'At Cornelius Vermuyden, we aim to be a caring and orderly community, where individuals are able to learn, contribute and develop. In order to achieve these aims, we seek to provide a disciplined and purposeful environment, where the traditional values of mutual care, consideration and acceptance flourish. As a learning community, we seek to provide an education that is exciting, challenging and prepares each child for life and learning beyond school, a broad based education in which achievement is celebrated and children succeed. We are proud of the achievements of our students and staff. Our new building is fantastic, fabulous, friendly with flexible spaces to support fast tracking for our most able pupils.' (<http://www.corneliusvermuyden.com/>)

The filming project at Cornelius Vermuyden School has similar themes to those of the previous project, in that we aimed to capture some of the activities in a school day. At secondary school level, the teaching is discipline-based, so we focussed on Science, Modern Foreign Languages and Maths, the key subjects we offer at Anglia Ruskin University as well some of the underpinning technologies that trainee teachers may come across in today's modern secondary schools.



Concluding Comments

This project will be formally evaluated by our potential trainee teachers in the summer of 2012; but early feedback from the two partner schools is extremely positive. Staff and pupils at both schools enjoyed taking part in creating a record of their exemplary teaching practices, and were keen to share their work with potential trainees. In terms of wider project impact, there is interest from our colleagues in nursing, who are keen to reuse the website template and 'drop in' their own narrative from what a potential nursing student would find useful about studying, and applying for, a nursing qualification.

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